

5 KEYS TO MAXIMIZING SALES WITH EXISTING ACCOUNTS

by Mike Schultz & John Doerr

Discover 5 areas in your organization where you can improve your key account penetration.





WHAT ARE THE KEYS TO MAXIMIZING SALES WITH EXISTING ACCOUNTS?

At RAIN Group, we get asked this question all the time. While we work with clients regularly to find the right answers for them, we've always wished there was more broad-based, best-practices research to help us guide our clients.

Since this research didn't exist, we decided to undertake it ourselves, and published the *Benchmark Report on High Performance in Strategic Account Management*.¹

From both our research and field work in the area, we know the following is true:

When it comes to growing accounts, high performers do things much differently than average and below-average performers.

We divided our 373 research participants into two groups—high performers, and average and below-average performers—based on revenue growth, profit growth, and client satisfaction improvement in named strategic accounts.

What we found is:

- + High performers are starkly different than average and below-average performers in a number of key areas.
- + These key areas have a significant impact on account growth and profitability.

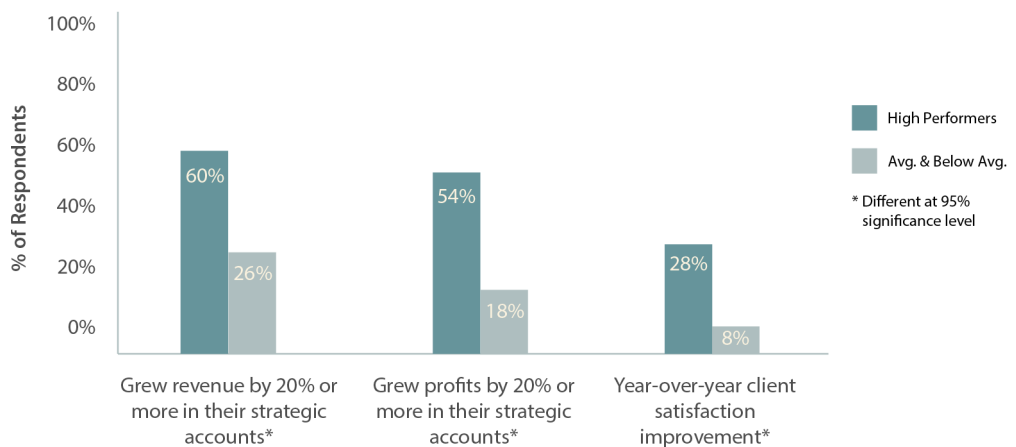
In this report, we cover five of the key areas that make a big difference in results, and where most companies have significant room for improvement. While there is more to do than improve only in these areas, progress here should have a significant impact on results.

The 5 key areas are:

1. Analyzing, strategizing, and communicating additional areas of **value** a company can offer their accounts
2. Analyzing and planning to improve **relationship strength** in more rigorous and scientific ways
3. Assembling the right **account team** and making sure eight key roles are played
4. Establishing an effective **account management process and planning tool**
5. Developing strong skills in strategic account management and selling

¹ Mike Schultz, John Doerr, and Mary Flaherty, *Benchmark Report on High Performance in Strategic Account Management* (Framingham: RAIN Group, 2012).

Figure 1. High Performers Compared to Average and Below-Average Performers





1. Value: The Key of Keys

Ask 100 different people at 100 different companies why their clients buy from them, and you'll likely hear 100 different answers with the same underlying theme: the value we provide.

We hear it expressed in a number of ways: we get results, our relationships are very close, they get from us what they've always wanted (but never gotten) from other companies, and we bring innovative solutions to the table.

All of it boils down to the key factor of all key factors: *value*.

If buyers value you and what you bring to the table, they'll buy, keep buying, and be open to expanding their relationship with you.

You might think, "Well, that's pretty obvious, isn't it?" Perhaps, but the reality is that high performers in account management are *much more likely* than average and below-average performers to do what they need to do to **expand** and **deepen** the value they bring to their accounts (Fig. 2 & Fig. 3).

UNDERSTANDING VALUE

Sellers and leaders who are best at bringing forth maximum value to their clients make it their business to understand the concept of value deeply. Since definitions of value can vary widely, here are three concepts we find are important to understand:

- 1. Value:** The monetary worth of something; that is, whether and how much someone will pay for something
- 2. Value Proposition:** The collection of reasons why a buyer buys; in essence, factors that affect whether they purchase, and from whom
- 3. Value Proposition Positioning Statement:** A compelling, tangible statement of how a company or individual will benefit from buying something specific or buying from you in general

Figure 2. How effective is your company's process to internally assess and evaluate additional value you can bring to strategic accounts?*

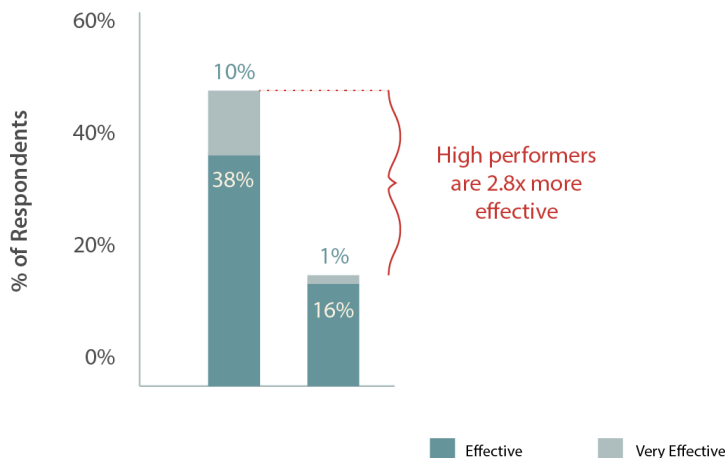
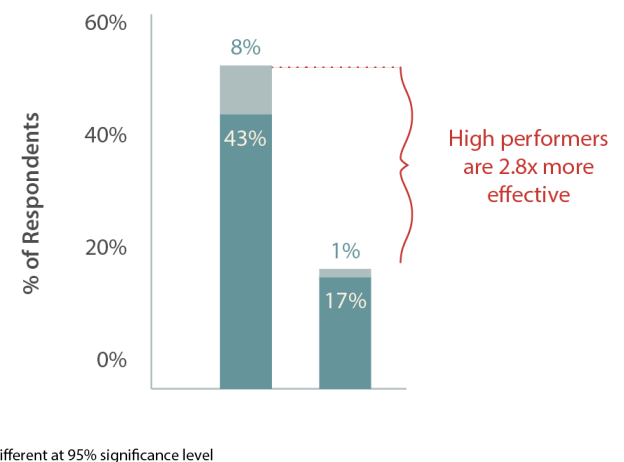


Figure 3. How effective is your company's process to work collaboratively with your strategic accounts to co-create value in new, innovative ways?*



High performers are, to a great extent, more effective at their internal process for assessing and evaluating additional value they can bring to their accounts. High performers are also, to a great extent, more effective at their process for working collaboratively with their accounts to co-create value in new and innovative ways.



VALUE – GET STARTED RIGHT

When it comes to the concept of value, we’ve found that many people have been introduced only to #3, a value proposition positioning statement. This is extremely limiting. People need to understand much more about value if they want to grow their accounts.

When everyone agrees that value itself is the “monetary worth of something,” account growth processes get off on the right foot. Agreeing on this definition allows people to start answering questions critical for account growth, such as:

- + Why do clients buy from us now?
- + Why are they willing to pay what they pay?
- + What else would they be willing to buy from us and at what price?

Coming up with the best ideas for how to expand the value (by having them buy more from you), and getting your accounts themselves involved in that process, takes real work. But the essence of it all is, indeed, this simple: **If you want to grow an account, you have to figure out what will increase your monetary worth to them.**

VALUE PROPOSITION—BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

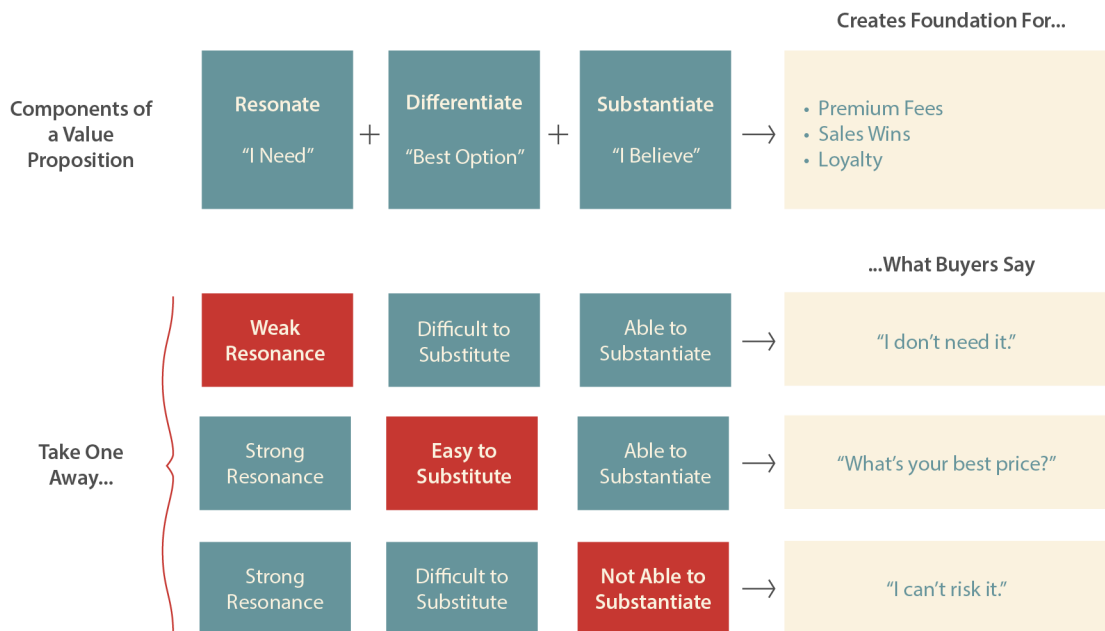
Companies that ask the previous questions start correctly, but are often at a loss for how to answer them.

If you can first make the compelling case to *yourself* for why your buyer should buy something, your chances of making the case to your accounts are good. This means you have to understand the key components that comprise your actual and potential value proposition for a *specific account*. They fall into three buckets:

1. They have to want and need what you’re selling. You have to *resonate* both rationally (making the case for ROI) and emotionally.
2. They have to see why you stand out from the other available options. You have to *differentiate*.
3. They have to believe that you can deliver on your promises. You have to *substantiate*.

Like a three-legged stool, if you take one leg away the entire stool topples over (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Three Components of a Value Proposition



What happens when a leg of the value proposition is missing?



2 WAYS TO EXPAND VALUE

There are essentially two ways to look at expanding the value you offer to your accounts:

- 1. Value Connection:** Exploring how you can provide more value to the client with your *existing offerings*
- 2. Value Co-Creation:** Working *collaboratively with the client as a team* to construct new ways of delivering value

In the last 10 years or so, the concept of value co-creation has been en vogue with marketing academics, especially as it relates to business-to-consumer markets. But its application for business-to-business markets is both well established (if not often discussed) and extremely powerful.

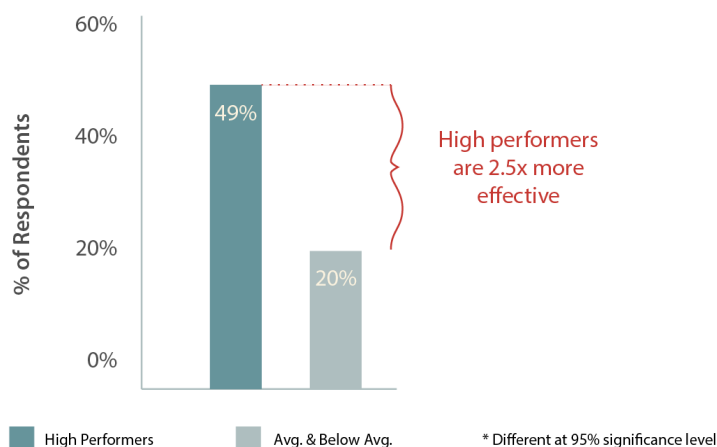
However, this does not mean companies should focus on value co-creation at the expense of value connection just because co-creation is newer, more exciting, and sounds cool. Untapped growth opportunities lie hidden in both.

VALUE CONNECTION

Companies should be selling more of their existing offerings to their customers. Yet, year after year, they don't.

There are many common reasons why.

Figure 5. How aligned are your organization's compensation and reporting structures to support the most effective execution of SAM? - Percent Aligned or Very Aligned



Often, the problem stems from the organization. Organizations create innumerable barriers to cross-selling, cross-organization collaboration, and account growth, including:

- + Compensation is not aligned for people to focus on growing their accounts
- + Lack of time or resources are available to the account manager to grow the account
- + Too many accounts spread account leaders too thin
- + Lack of tools (like account planning frameworks and templates) are available to help them expand value to clients
- + Pressure to focus on short-term results vs. long-term growth

And a long list of other potential reasons.

In Fig. 5, for example, high performers are 2.5x more likely than average and below-average performers to align compensation to support account growth.

Let's assume for a minute that an organization has built an environment that supports account growth. The following still tend to happen at the account-team level. Account leaders often:

1. Don't *know enough* about the other offerings of the organization to know how they would be valuable to their client
2. Don't *see* the additional opportunities
3. Don't *trust* other areas of their organization or are territorial about their accounts
4. Don't *bring their internal team together* to explore ways they can add more value to clients
5. Don't have the *facilitation skills* to fully explore the value they can offer to clients internally



Figure 6. Value Connection vs. Value Co-Creation

CATEGORY	VALUE CONNECTION	VALUE CO-CREATION
Who drives the demand?	Either the provider or the account.	Almost always driven by the provider.
Who builds the offering?	Provider builds it. Account either buys or they don't.	Defined collaboratively through joint problem definition and problem solving.
Who is it built for?	The market. Many can buy it.	A specific account. It's "for" one company only.*
Is there leadership involvement?	Not always necessary. Seller and buyer can transact within typical parameters.	Almost always necessary. Seller and buyer must include leaders in cross-functional roles.
What is the essence of the interaction?	Focused on either a specific product or a service to solve a need.	Provider involves the account directly in building the offering. It's joint development.
What is the level of customization?	Limited/within established parameters.	Extensive/outside of established parameters.

*While value co-creation is built for a specific company, often what's built can be leveraged for other accounts/prospects, and can create the foundation of core offerings.

6. Don't have the *sales and conversation skills* needed to create new opportunities, drive demand, beat (or unseat) competitors, and so on
7. Don't even *try* to bring the full capabilities of the organization to bear for their client's success. This can be for many reasons, such as they don't know how to do it, they're too busy doing other things, or they aren't motivated to grow the account

For whatever reason—organizational or individual—companies are not selling the broad range of products and services to their accounts and this creates huge untapped opportunities for growth.

VALUE CO-CREATION

It's trendy to focus on value co-creation for a very good reason: it can be the catalyst for significant account growth.

As a concept, when people consider value co-creation, they often get too complicated. It's much easier to understand it in terms of the chart above (Fig. 6).

How to co-create value is a topic for another time. However, those companies that are successful at it experience the following:

- + Increased differentiation, because few companies are willing to engage accounts with this level of rigor, intensity, and collaboration
- + Increased embeddedness with accounts, thus expanding client loyalty because the existence of substitutes for co-created value is rare
- + Increased rational and emotional resonance with accounts because offerings exclusively built for accounts often create breakthrough ROI, and because account leaders are more emotionally connected to something they had a hand in building
- + Increased trust and relationship strength built through the collaboration and transparency required to make the value co-creation process work properly

Company leaders often lament the increasing commoditization of offerings, increasing substitutes available to buyers, and a sea change in business that gives buyers more information, power, and control over suppliers. All of these result in price pressure and decreased customer loyalty.

Companies that add value co-creation to their efforts are bucking these trends and are more likely to become high performers.

Average and below-average performers find "aligning offerings and operations in ways that create value" **69% more challenging** than high performers.



2. Relationship Strength

Ask most people about the strength of their core client relationships and they'll say, "Great. Rock solid. Very deep."

However, many are commenting on how much rapport or trust they feel they have with the client instead of through the lens of business value the client receives.

Ask them:

- + "Can your team call top management and get through easily?" They'll say, "Maybe. In some places yes, and others, probably not so much."
- + "If your relationship with the account ended, how difficult would the majority of people there perceive it to be to replace you?" Sometimes they'll say, "It would create major challenges." Other times, though they might not say it, the truth is the buyer would call a competitor and replace them fairly quickly with only minor disruption.
- + "How much value does your client perceive they receive from your relationship?" Sometimes it's "some," sometimes it's "major," and other times, "breakthrough, company-changing value." However, all too often, it's "well, I'm not sure."

Even simple questions, such as, "Would the account themselves describe their relationship with you as trivial, worthwhile, important, or essential?" yield answers all over the map.

If you want to grow account revenue, you have to strengthen and deepen your existing relationships, establish new relationships in other buying centers and at enterprise levels, and view your relationship as "our company to their company" as much as you do "myself to my client."

The companies that grow accounts most are scientific about relationship analysis and specific about their relationship growth strategies. They view relationships less on how much they like each other and more on the business value of the relationship as the *client* perceives it.

On the following page, you'll find RAIN Group's Relationship Strength Matrix (Fig. 7). Use this as a tool at your account meetings to:

- + Define the current state of your relationships with individuals and the account overall
- + Set targets for where you need to be to maximize account growth

Think about it. The more the account:

- + Wants what you can provide (resonate)
- + Sees you as the best option (differentiate)
- + Believes you can produce (substantiate)

... the higher up you'll get in each category in the Relationship Strength Matrix.



Figure 7. Relationship Strength Matrix

RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH	PARTNERSHIP	PERCEPTION OF VALUE	RELATIONSHIP LOSS EFFECT	REACTION TO REPLACEMENT	COMPETITIVE BIDDING	REPLACE US BY THEMSELVES
5 - Essential "Trusted Partner"	Proactive strategic co-development (partnership with power)	Breakthrough	Catastrophic difficulties	Fights	Rare or "through the motions" bidding, typically shape procurement	No
4 - Important "Strategic Supplier"	Proactive input (access to power)	Major	Major challenges	Resists	Sometimes sole source, sometimes "shape" bidding process	Unlikely
3 - Worthwhile "Preferred Supplier"	Reactive input (some access to power)	Some	Some challenges	May resist	Typical - sometimes preferred with early knowledge	May listen to overtures
2 - Trivial "Supplier"	None (trivial executive access)	Trivial to none	No challenges	Unlikely to resist	Typical - rarely have early knowledge	Likely
1 - No Relationship	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
0 - Poor / Negative	Avoidance of interaction	Negative	Benefits outweigh challenges	Positive	Avoidance of including you	Yes

High Performers and Average and Below-Average Performers Agree

Getting senior management involved and supportive of strategic account growth initiatives contributes most to their efforts of maximizing revenue from accounts.



3. Right Team

At many companies, account leaders find themselves in their positions because they were the person who originally sold an account. It's understandable why this happens.

They sold it. It's theirs.

All too often, though, they're not the right fit to play the lead role in growing an account to its potential. This is not to say that this account leader should be removed, and it does not mean they aren't successful in their own right. Indeed, they are typically essential to the process of the growth of their accounts. They just can't do it alone with maximum effectiveness.

High performers are 26% more likely to be effective in growing revenue by "creating team-based approaches to working with accounts" (Fig. 8).

Average and below-average performers are both less likely to employ team approaches and less likely to find success when they do.

IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT ACCOUNT MANAGER

Often the people in the role of account leader are what we call Relationship Leads. They're historically experts in a particular area of products or services the company offers. They often sell a lot of—and do a great job with—the area that they have historically sold. Their relationships with at least a few stakeholders at accounts are solid.

However, they often don't:

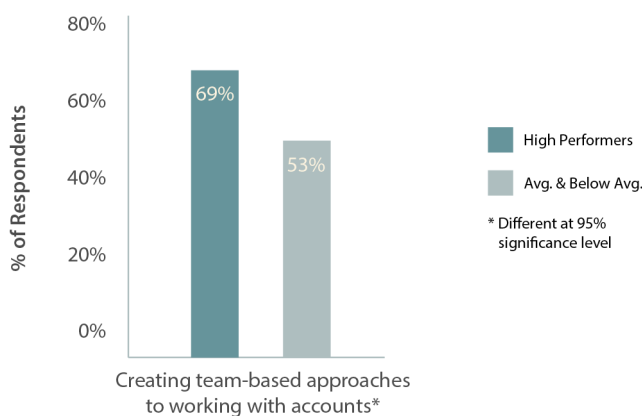
- + Drive the account-growth process—they're commonly happy with the business they have (even if they wouldn't say it)
- + See the opportunities where their company can offer value outside of their personal area of expertise and comfort zone
- + Do a good job building account plans
- + Stay on top of implementation (if they do happen to build an account plan)—they don't act on action plans consistently, don't find new buying centers, often don't create new opportunities, and if they do, they don't win them often enough
- + Have the all-too-often-discussed enterprise conversation

Even when they recognize this, most organizations try to train these unsuited account leaders to become (or replace them with) the perfect "strategic account manager" that can do all of these things.

It usually doesn't work.

The key is to not try to find one person who can do everything well, but to make sure everything that needs to get done gets done well.

Figure 8. What ACTIONS do you believe contribute most to your efforts to maximize revenue from accounts? - Percent Effective or Very Effective





THE 8 STRATEGIC ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT ROLES

Making sure everything gets done well means putting together the right account team. There are eight distinct strategic account management roles that must be played to maximize account success. These are:

The Big 3:

1. Relationship Lead
2. Entrepreneur
3. Innovator

Rounding out the rest:

4. Collaborator
5. Technical Expert
6. Researcher
7. Project Manager
8. Skeptic

For the most part, these roles are not played by eight different people on an account team. People usually play several roles. The key is to make sure that if a role is important it isn't missed.

Also note that these aren't always "dedicated" roles on the team. People can play these roles for multiple accounts.

THE BIG 3 ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT ROLES

1. Relationship Lead

The Relationship Lead is the embedded player (or players) in the account who creates and strengthens relationships. The Relationship Lead defends against competitor inroads. At larger companies, the Relationship Lead can be the manager of a sizeable internal team who leads individual relationships with stakeholders.

At most companies, if a role is being played well already (but certainly not always), it's the Relationship Lead.

Tip: Most Relationship Leads are either good at creating relationships (prospecting) or strengthening relationships, but less often both. If you want to penetrate more deeply into strategic accounts, you need both.

When the Relationship Lead is missing, you don't penetrate accounts deeply, and repeat business suffers.

2. Entrepreneur

Also known as the Driver, the Entrepreneur leads the charge for maximizing business inside of the "market" of the account. The Entrepreneur is itching for growth. You don't have to light the fire in the belly of the Entrepreneur. If you, yourself, don't bring up maximizing account growth, she will.

Tip: Many companies think their Relationship Leads can be molded into Entrepreneurs. One person can certainly play both of these roles, but too many companies try to force their Relationship Leads into the role of the Entrepreneur when it doesn't fit. Then it doesn't work.

When the Entrepreneur is missing, no one drives account growth, and account plans don't get built or implemented.

3. Innovator

Also called the Value Creator and the Visionary, the Innovator sees ways to increase value to the account that others often don't. Tell an Innovator about a new company capability and they "get it" and its value right away.

The Innovator is often an internal evangelist for the breakthrough change your company can create for clients, and value you can co-create with clients. Innovators synthesize information and can communicate the big picture to executive-level clients. They also tend to be instrumental in facilitating value-discovery sessions with clients.

Tip: Executive-level clients—the elusive "enterprise buyers"—need the kind of vision and energy delivered by Innovators in interactions with your company. Otherwise they lose interest and you end up working a level, or two, or six lower in their organizations.

When the Innovator is missing, you get weak visions for growing the account and miss opportunities to create value.



The reason these are the “Big 3” account management roles is because virtually every company needs them in place for every account. It’s rare to find an account manager—one person—who plays all three well at an account without collaboration from others on their team.

Depending on your company’s size, culture, and goals for your accounts, you’ll likely need some mix of the rest of the roles played as well. As you read along, ask yourself which ones you think you might need to strengthen at your company.

THE REST OF THE ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT ROLES

4. Collaborator

The Collaborator is the internal team builder who keeps processes moving forward, builds internal bridges and trust, and gets the right people involved at the right times to produce the best outcomes.

When the Collaborator is missing, you don’t leverage all of your company’s capability sets.

5. Technical Expert

The Technical Expert is the specialist / analyst / technician who has relevant depth of knowledge in specific areas and the ability to solve problems and facilitate discussions in these areas.

When the Technical Expert is missing, your possibilities are limited and ideas get shot down when “it can’t be done” trumps “we can figure it out.”

6. Researcher

The Researcher is the detective on the account team who finds out information critical for maximizing the business within an account.

Researchers often fall into two categories: behind the scenes and with the client. Getting behind the scenes Researchers in place is typically a matter of resources. Figure out what you need, and then garner the resources to get it.

The other category of Researcher finds things out from the client. This Researcher role could be the Relationship Lead, the Technical Expert, or anyone on the client team who has the connections to find things out that you need to know.

When the Researcher is missing, you miss opportunities, chase dead ends, and slow everything down.

7. Project Manager

The Project Manager is the organizer of the process of capturing revenue from the account. The Project Manager:

- + Gets necessary resources in place
- + Formulates (or helps formulate) an actionable, appropriately thorough account plan
- + Tracks actions and outcomes

When the Project Manager is missing, account plans don’t get implemented.

8. Skeptic

The Skeptic is the foil, the reality checker, and the devil’s advocate for all the big ideas your team develops to maximize your account success. The Skeptic makes sure assumptions are questioned, strategies and plans are tested and vetted (and thus strengthened), and only the most promising opportunities move forward.

When the Skeptic is missing, you move plans forward before weeding out the bad ideas.

As you consider the eight strategic account management roles, keep in mind that they can be played by any number of people (one, two, five, eight, more, etc.), but they should all be played to some extent.

If you want to be a top performer and ensure you create and deliver all the value you should to your strategic accounts you must attend to these eight roles.

36% OF AVERAGE AND BELOW-AVERAGE PERFORMERS STRUGGLE WITH COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION AMONG VARIOUS GROUPS AT THEIR COMPANIES.



4. Account Management Process and Planning Tool

Of 19 challenges we researched that limit account growth, two rose to the top as being much more challenging for average and below-average performers than high performers:

- 1. Having an effective strategic account planning tool (Fig. 9):** Average and below-average performers are 2.8x more likely than high performers to report this as challenging.
- 2. Having an effective strategic account management process (Fig. 10):** Average and below-average performers are 2.7x more likely than high performers to report this as challenging.

Companies that don't have an effective tool often don't have one because they're not committed to account growth as a systematic process and they don't commit to account planning as a necessary component of account growth success.

With RAIN Group clients, we find that a five-stage strategic account management process works best, and can be calibrated up or down depending on the company's needs. The stages of the RAIN Group Strategic Account Management ProcessSM are described on the next page (Fig. 11).

Note that each stage has its own:

- 1. Outputs:** Outcomes of each stage
- 2. Actions:** Core set of activities designed to produce those outputs

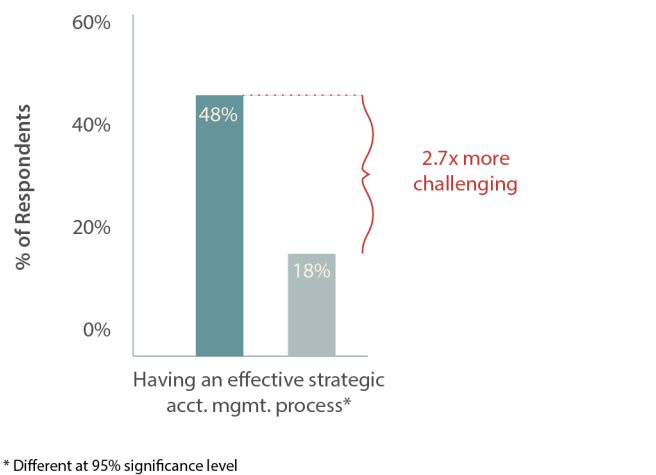
ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT PROCESS

While having an effective strategic account management tool is a significant difference that separates high performers from the rest, the challenge of having an effective tool does not exist in a vacuum.

Figure 9. Consider the CHALLENGES your company faces in strategic account management. Please indicate how challenging it is to your company's strategic account management efforts. - Percent Challenging or Very Challenging



Figure 10. Consider the CHALLENGES your company faces in strategic account management. Please indicate how challenging it is to your company's strategic account management efforts. - Percent Challenging or Very Challenging



* Different at 95% significance level



Figure 11. RAIN Group Strategic Account Management Process Stages

	STRATEGY	RESEARCH	ACTION PLAN	EXECUTION	REVIEW
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic accounts selection Account goal possibilities Opportunity targets Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Account Plan (start) Account core team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Account Plan Account extended team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships deepened Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created Expanded Captured Competitors neutralized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Account Scorecard Action plan adjustments
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charter team Facilitate Value Discovery Session - internal Establish success metrics (KPIs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin Account Plan Form core account team Gather data to inform strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Account Plan Tighten plan with "VC Test" Launch plan into action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value discovery and co-creation meetings Alignment activities and organizational adapting Core RAIN Selling activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results tracking Short-term action adjustment Shift back to strategy
Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximizing account growth Business strategy Value proposition R D S Team building Process and meeting facilitation Systems thinking Conceptual thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Account plan component specifics Account research principles Internal research principles Aggregating & synthesizing data into big picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action plan creation process Resource allocation Project management Internal influence Plan presentation "VC Test" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core RAIN Selling concepts Influence Principles Conceptual Thinking Systems Thinking Facilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success analysis Action adjustment Strategy pivots and reallocations Communication
Rising to the Occasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactivity Vision Urgency Value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "A" players Not accepting "I don't know" Research <i>with</i> accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excitement creation Influence Resource maximization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value co-creation and partnership execution Company change for accounts Internal trust Building enterprise relationships Relationship embedding Core RAIN principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not skipping review Driving continuous improvement Driving strategy with review

3. Concepts: Methods and conceptual models that the SAM team must understand to execute each stage

4. Rising to the Occasion: Understanding what high performers do that sets them apart from the rest

Some of the concepts in the process, such as meeting facilitation, action planning, and team chartering, are well understood on their face,

but as noted throughout this report, they're often not implemented well.

Other concepts are very specific to account management (see an example on the next page of the Venture Capital Test). When applied well, they have a huge impact on success.

Now, does any company implement everything well in every stage of the account management process? No.



EXAMPLE: THE VENTURE CAPITAL (VC) TEST

When entrepreneurs seek serious investment capital, they have to present their plan compellingly to venture capitalists. Account teams should do the same with account plans, because an account plan is essentially an entrepreneurial business plan.

Each plan is an argument for allocating people and resources over and above what the company typically applies in a normal sales process. The idea is that, over a period of time, these efforts will achieve growth in the “market” of each account.

Since the entrepreneurial account team is looking for investors (company leadership in this case) to endorse above-the-norm time, energy, and money in order to achieve above-the-norm results, they should present a compelling plan just like an entrepreneur would to a venture capitalist.

When an account team presents a compelling case to leadership about the need to invest additional resources in accounts:

- + The plans are much tighter at the outset as the team makes sure it’s strong before sharing it with their own clients
- + Plans take into account capabilities across the whole organization
- + Plans get even tighter when the “VCs” make suggestions for improvement
- + Company leadership gets behind the team and the plan, making for much improved plan execution

In addition, cross-functional and divisional ties are strengthened as the VC Test creates a forum for collaboration and communication among groups.

And should the planning rigor for accounts with small potential be the same as those with large potential? No.

But, in every case, the process stages are the same.

High performers make it their business to know what the details of success look like and how to achieve them in every stage of the process.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ACCOUNT-PLANNING TOOL

Once you have a process in place, you need a fundamental tool to allow you to put that process into practice and apply it with your accounts.

The elements of an effective account-planning tool are:

1. Account goals
2. Research
3. Stakeholders
4. Opportunities
5. Strategies and action
6. Competitive positioning

The categories themselves are not earth shattering, but they don’t need to be. The keys are getting the right information in each area, completing information in each area, and calibrating the rigor of planning with the total opportunity available in the account.

It’s the detail that’s important. In each category, there is a series of questions you should ask yourself.

EXAMPLE: QUESTIONS TO ASK REGARDING STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

- + What is the overall measure of our relationship with this account? What does it need to be?
- + What do we need to do to get to a stronger relationship level?
- + What are our overall strengths with this account?
- + What vulnerabilities exist with our current relationship with this account?



- + Across all buying centers in this account, where can they benefit from our existing offerings?
- + How can we co-create value?
- + What will surprise and delight this account?
- + What are the “Big Play” strategies we are pursuing for:
 - Strengthening existing relationships?
 - Creating new relationships?
 - Expanding value offered to relationships?
 - Unseating competitors, or preventing their inroads?
- + Who’s responsible for executing these strategies, and when will key actions be completed?

In order to be most successful at penetrating your accounts, your strategies within each element of your account-planning tool should be

as granular as possible. We provided examples from within the strategies and actions element here, but you should ask as many questions, if not more, for each of the other five elements.

Whether you use an existing account planning framework (as many RAIN Group clients use ours), or you customize it to suit your needs, it’s important to have a tool that works for you.

When you do, you’ll be able to see the account as a whole, how you can add more value, and create a plan to turn your ideas into reality. Make sure your tool is used as a standard across your organization, and make sure your team has the skills to create a plan that will identify and capture the greatest potential growth.

If you don’t have effective account planning tool you use across all accounts, it’s virtually impossible to make real progress in growing accounts systematically.

TOP 5 CHALLENGES WITH LARGEST DISPARITY BETWEEN HIGH PERFORMERS AND THE REST

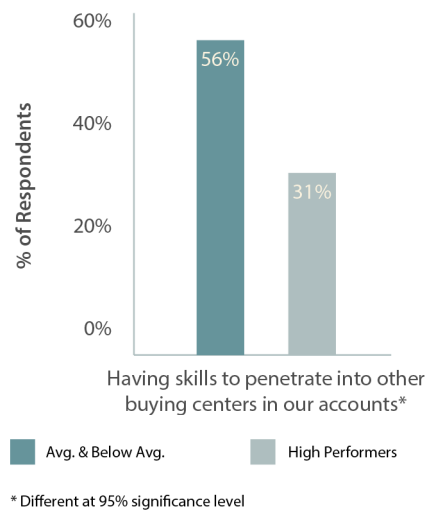
- + Having an effective strategic account planning tool
- + Having an effective strategic account management process
- + Having skills to penetrate into other buying centers in our accounts
- + Implementing our strategic account plans after they're built
- + Aligning offerings, processes, and operations in ways to create value for strategic accounts

From *Benchmark Report on High Performance in Strategic Account Management*



5. Sales Skills and Account Management Skills

Figure 12. Consider the CHALLENGES your company faces in strategic account management. For each factor, please indicate how challenging it is to your company's strategic account management efforts. - Percent Challenging or Very Challenging



We at RAIN Group spend quite a bit of time differentiating between the concepts of sales and account management with our clients. As we wrote in *Why Strategic Account Management Fails – And What to Do About It*,² they are not the same thing.

Yet, they're both necessary, and they work closely together.

Without strategic account management skills, you can't build a good account strategy or plan, won't put the right team together, and won't be able to work with clients over the long term to maximize the overall strength of relationships.

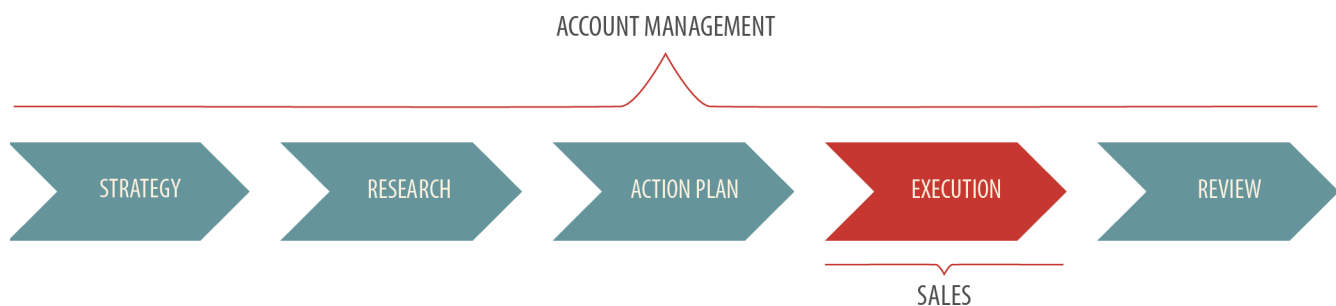
Assuming you do, you still need to implement the plan and penetrate the account. Another top challenge of average and below-average performers is "having the skills to penetrate other buying centers in accounts" (Fig. 12).

This challenge relates as much to selling as it does to account management.

Take another look at the stages of the RAIN Group Strategic Account Management Process (Fig. 13). Strategic account management skills are required throughout, but without the sales skills necessary for execution, your planning efforts will not yield revenue.

2. Mike Schultz and John Doerr, *Why Strategic Account Management Fails - And What to Do About It* (Framingham: RAIN Group, 2012).

Figure 13. RAIN Group Strategic Account Management Process





Without sales skills, no matter how good you are at building account teams and plans, you can't:

- + Create new opportunities
- + Penetrate new buying centers
- + Inspire clients to pursue new ideas and possibilities
- + Understand clients' buying processes
- + Move opportunities forward
- + Stand out against the competition
- + Make a compelling business case for buying
- + Present solutions, overcome objections, and win new business

If you want to be able to execute account plans, you need sales skills. In our research, along with challenges, we also looked at a number of areas that are necessary and effective for maximizing account revenue. Two of the top three areas that separate high performers are:

- + Training in account management
- + Training in sales and relationship skills

Interestingly, while almost 7 in 10 high performers rate training in sales and relationship skills as effective or extremely effective in maximizing revenue, just over half of average and below-average performers also report excellent results from sales training (Fig. 15).

Like the rest of the factors that contribute to high performance in strategic account management, sales training success is

dependent on a number of variables.

First, as we outlined in our report *Why Sales Training Fails*,³ many attempts at sales training do not result in sales skills. The training itself has to work to develop the needed skills, knowledge, and attributes. You can't get results if the training isn't the right fit or just plain isn't good.

Second, even if people have the capability to do something, it doesn't mean they will actually do it. This can be for many reasons, such as:

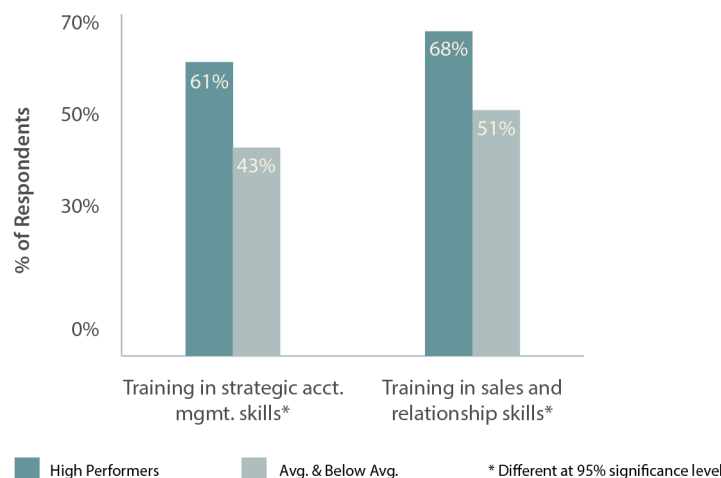
- + Their compensation is not aligned to expectations
- + They are expected to do other things that trump their focus on selling
- + There is a lack of sales management
- + There is a lack of leadership support
- + They don't want to work that hard
- + They will work that hard, but not in areas related to selling

How you go about building these skills is its own discussion. The fact remains: you have to build these skills to a high level or you'll consistently underachieve.

Executing account management requires selling skills as well as account management skills. If you don't have them both, account growth will suffer tremendously.

3. Mike Schultz and John Doerr, *Why Sales Training Fails* (Framingham: RAIN Group, 2010).

Figure 15. Top Revenue Maximization Efforts that Are Effective or Extremely Effective with Largest Disparities





Maximize Sales with Your Existing Accounts

When it comes to maximizing revenue in accounts, it all comes back to value. The more value you provide to accounts, the more they'll be willing to buy from you, and the more they'll be willing to stay for the long-term.

While every company's path to delivering maximum value to their accounts will be somewhat different, one thing is true: you might as well learn from and emulate the companies that do it best in the areas that make the biggest difference.

If we had to boil it down, when companies get these five areas right, they tend to do an excellent job maximizing account growth:

- 1. Value:** Understand the concept of value and bring forth maximum value for your clients in ways that resonate, differentiate, and substantiate. Utilize both value connection and co-creation to do so.
- 2. Relationship Strength:** Be specific and goal oriented to move accounts up the relationship matrix.
- 3. Right Team:** Have the right people working together to cover the eight strategic account management roles.
- 4. Account Management Process and Planning Tool:** Systematically and rigorously follow an account management process and use a planning tool consistently across accounts that works for you.
- 5. Sales Skills and Account Management Skills:** Make sure you have both at a high level of proficiency.

RAIN Group Can Help You Grow Your Strategic Accounts



There's no question that high performers in strategic account management achieve higher revenue growth, profit, and customer satisfaction than the rest.

The right training coupled with the right advisory services can have a significant effect on your success.

At RAIN Group, we help build and execute strategic account management initiatives that achieve the greatest possible success. We'll work with you to build the processes and skills needed to penetrate, expand, and protect strategic accounts.

We help clients succeed with strategic account management in two ways:

1. **Consulting and Advisory Services** to help build, implement, and improve strategic account management initiatives.
2. **Training in Strategic Account Management** to help your teams build skills and knowledge to succeed in SAM planning and implementation.

Our core training program, Strategic Account Management: How to Penetrate, Expand, and Protect Strategic Accounts, gives your team the critical skills and knowledge needed to significantly grow accounts. We teach your team how to:

- + Build account plans that actually work and result in revenue growth, deeper partnerships, and overall account success.
- + Lead value discover sessions internally and with accounts for the purpose of value discovery, connection, and co-creation.
- + View needs from the customer's perspective to strengthen and deepen your ability to create value for accounts.
- + Assess SAM success and determine whether they need to stay the course, pivot, or otherwise adjust the strategy.

HOW ONE COMPANY GREW ACCOUNTS 110% YEAR-OVER-YEAR

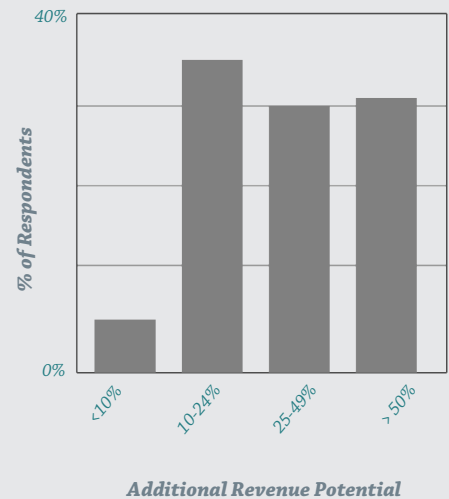
After implementing RAIN Group's strategic account management process, Woodard & Curran saw significant growth. In the named accounts where the method was applied, the 4-year compound annual growth rate was a whopping 110% (compared to 7% across all accounts).

In a single account alone, sales grew from a quarter of a million dollars to \$3.5 million as a direct result of implementing the strategic account plan.

Contact us to learn how we can help you grow strategic accounts.

The Untapped Opportunity to Grow Strategic Accounts

More than half of companies that engage in strategic account management believe they can grow the revenue of strategic accounts by 25% to 49%, or more:



What Our Clients Say

"RAIN Group took the time to understand us. They didn't just provide cookie-cutter training programs, but instead learned our culture, our goals, and our people to provide advice and training that really made a difference. The financial results, of course, speak for themselves."

Dave MacDonald
Partner and VP of Account Management
Woodard & Curran

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Locations

Americas • EMEA • Asia-Pacific



UNLEASH THE SALES POTENTIAL OF YOUR TEAM WITH RAIN GROUP

RAIN Group is a sales training, assessment, and performance improvement company that helps leading organizations improve sales results. We've helped hundreds of thousands of salespeople, managers, and professionals in more than 62 countries increase their sales significantly with our RAIN SellingSM methodology.

We can help you:

IMPLEMENT SALES TRAINING THAT DELIVERS REAL RESULTS

RAIN Group's sales training system inspires real change and delivers real results that last. Our rigorous approach includes sales team evaluation, customized training programs, robust reinforcement, and coaching to help you and your team develop sales and negotiation skills, and maximize your results.

IDENTIFY WHO CAN AND WILL SELL WITH GREAT SUCCESS

Our assessments measure sales attributes and skills, identifying the factors that really make a difference in sales performance. Whether you're looking to hire someone who can and will sell, or looking to improve sales performance, we'll help you build the most successful sales team.

GROW YOUR KEY ACCOUNTS

At most companies, there's a huge, untapped opportunity to add more value—and thus sell more—to existing accounts. We help our clients capitalize on these revenue growth opportunities. Whether it's simply increasing cross-selling and up-selling or implementing a major strategic account management program, we can help.

IMPLEMENT WORLD-CLASS SALES COACHING

We coach sellers, professionals, and leaders individually and in groups to achieve the greatest and fastest increase in sales results. And we train and certify leaders and managers in our RAIN Sales Coaching system. Often, it's RAIN Sales Coaching that truly unlocks the team's potential, and keeps them motivated to produce the best results consistently.

Find out more about how RAIN Group can help you unleash the sales potential of your team by visiting RAINGroup.com or calling (508) 405-0438.

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